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Klokgieters, S.S.

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Social position of older immigrants in the Netherlands: Where do immigrants perceive themselves on the societal ladder?

Abstract

Older Turkish and Moroccan immigrants are often ascribed a low social position based on their relatively unfavourable educational level, occupational status and income. Yet immigrants emigrated to improve their social position and came from contexts where determinants of social position might be based on different socio-cultural circumstances than those used in the country of settlement. Therefore, the perceived social position might be multidimensional. 23 60-68 year old immigrants from Turkish and Moroccan origin in the Netherlands were interviewed. They were asked to position themselves on a ten rung ladder at three moments in their life course: before migration, after settlement and currently. Most participants placed themselves at a middle or high position. Factors that contributed were circumstances related to socioeconomic indicators, but also circumstances related to social affirmation, family, social integration, physical and mental health, happiness and complying to religious prescriptions. When these circumstances were deemed favourable, participants tended to position themselves higher. In conclusion, participants had a comprehensive and dynamic view of their social position with not all immigrants experiencing their position unfavourably. The experience is based on socioeconomic, social, societal, well-being and religion circumstances and experiences of their social changed position across the life course based on their migration experience.

Keywords: Social position; older immigrants; socioeconomic circumstances; social status.

Introduction

Like many Western European countries, the Netherlands is faced with both the ageing of the population and an increasing ethnic diversity of the older population (Zubair & Norris, 2015). Especially former labour immigrants are making up an increased share of the urban older population (Fokkema & Conkova, 2018). These immigrants have moved to the Netherlands for reasons of performing physical labour in the 1960s and 1970s and family reunification in the 1980s. Former labour immigrants are disadvantaged compared to the native population because of their relatively low socioeconomic position in the country of settlement (Fokkema & Naderi, 2013). They often migrated from poorer socioeconomic contexts and received little to no schooling. Upon arrival in the country of settlement, they have often performed hard physical labour for a large portion of their life (Guiraudon, 2014). As a consequence, many report a poorer health than their native peers, which makes them an especially vulnerable group in old age (Solé-Auró & Crimmins, 2008).

While older immigrants face cumulative vulnerabilities and have a low social position (Reijneveld, 1998; Schellingerhout, 2004), a pitfall is that this focus on vulnerabilities precludes the appreciation of the diversity within immigrant groups (King, Lulle, Sampaio, & Vullnetari, 2017). This is especially so with regards to their diverse migration histories, present experiences and outlooks on their social position (Palmberger, 2017). Importantly, the sole focus on vulnerabilities (Norman, 1985) runs the risk that older immigrants are merely considered a 'social problem' in the wider society (Rouvoet, Eijberts, & Ghorashi, 2017; Torres, 2006).

The perception of social position of older immigrants themselves has received scant attention in the literature (Fresnoza-Flot & Shinozaki, 2017). When investigating social position, older immigrants are without exception placed at the bottom of the societal ladder (ven Draak, Hosper, Kosec, & van Wieringen, 2012; Meulenkamp, van Beek, Gerritsen, de Graaff, & Francke, 2010; Reijneveld, 1998; Schellingerhout, 2004). Markers of household income, occupational status and level of education are often used to justify the ascribed social position (Vrooman, Gijsberts, & Boelhouwer, 2014). Immigrants are placed low because they have a relatively low income, low level of education and are mostly situated at the bottom of the labour market (Snel, Brugers, & Leerkes, 2007). The social position of immigrants is often understood as fixed and one-dimensional (Schellingerhout, 2004). However, there are features in the migration history that point to the contrary. For example, the driving force behind migration has been to enhance economic security and improve working conditions (Woo, Wang, & Takeuchi, 2017). Ultimately, immigrants sought to improve their social position (Goldring 2004; Glick-Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992). In addition, indicators used for self-placement are not always confined to traditional socioeconomic indicators. Indicators may for example

vary by ethnic group or gender resulting in more favourable outlooks than expected (Ostrove, Adler, Kuppermann, & Washington, 2000).

This study draws attention to the varied and dynamic nature in which position on the social ladder is perceived among older individuals with a migration background. In addition, it studies whether this view represents the low social position that is commonly ascribed to immigrants or whether immigrants position themselves differently. Self-perceived social position is likely to involve a combination of comparisons including reflected appraisals (i.e. how we perceive that others see us), social comparisons (i.e. comparisons of self to others), and adaptive expectations (i.e. one's own past performance) (Franzini & Fernandez-Esquer, 2006). Immigration background and ageing are likely to intersect with processes in three important ways.

First, Singh-Manoux et al. (2003) have shown that self-assigned social position involves cognitive averaging of traditional indicators of socioeconomic position. It is unclear how important traditional socioeconomic indicators actually are in immigrant's evaluation of their social position. In agricultural societies, such as Turkey and Morocco, where many of formal labour immigrants in the Netherlands originated from, markers of status might be more readily associated with land ownership or property ownership (Kaya, 2008). Moreover, societies in Turkey and Morocco place particular emphasis on gendered status obtainment through marriage and Islamic religiosity that pervade cultural practices (Buitelaar, 2006; Uğurlu, Türkoğlu, & Kuzlak, 2018). In these conditions, males might be awarded status on the basis of being a father, breadwinner and householder whereas females are awarded status when they are a mother, self-sacrificing and nurturing (Uğurlu, Türkoğlu, & Kuzlak 2018). Another way in which status might be afforded is through age. According to Yerden (2013), less industrialized countries tend to award more status to older people on the basis of their wisdom, respect and calmness. All these aspects may come into play when immigrants are asked to determine their own social position, especially immigrants approaching old age.

The second point is that people's perception of their social position may change throughout the life course (Singh-Manoux, Adler, & Marmot, 2003). Perceived social position involves aspects of personal growth, future prospects or positive past experiences (Woo, Wang, & Takeuchi, 2017). With regards to immigrants, it is likely that the intersection between age and migration plays a central role. Individuals who seek to migrate may do so because they have hopes for a better future for themselves and their children (Woo, Wang, & Takeuchi, 2017). This may be observed, for example, in the initial stages after migration when immigrants tend to place importance into signalling status (Danzer, Dietz, Gatskova, & Schmillen, 2014). Signalling status is a means for relative newcomers in a society to claim legitimacy and fight their way in. Similarly, when immigrants reach retirement age, they cease to be labourers.

This may spark them to re-evaluate the own status again, together with doubts for whether to stay or leave the country of settlement (Bolzman, Fibbi, & Vial, 2006).

Third, the referent group with which immigrants compare themselves may change over time because they migrate from one country to another. According to social comparison theories, people tend to compare themselves to similar others in order to find their place within a social order (Wolff, Subramanian, Acevedo-Garcia, Weber, & Kawachi, 2010). Immigrants may compare themselves to other immigrants living in the country of settlement (Leach & Smith 2006), or they may compare themselves with individuals who stayed behind in the country of origin (Fresnoza-Flot & Shinozaki 2017). This has been observed for instance through a 'transnational expenditure cascade' for Vietnamese women living in the U.S. (Tai, 2014) and female domestic workers from Filipino decent (Pareňas, 2001). This cascade refers to the idea that immigrants in the aforementioned studies improved their social position in the country of origin substantially after migration while still occupying a disadvantaged position in the country of settlement. Comparison groups will have differing consequences for the position that immigrants ascribe to themselves on the societal ladder.

In our study, we address three research questions: (1) Where do older immigrants position themselves on the societal ladder? (2) Do they have socioeconomic circumstances in mind when positioning themselves, or are other considerations important to them? If so, which ones? (3) Does their perception of social position change when it refers to different stages in their life course (i.e. currently, right after migration and before migration)?

Methods

Data collection

Perceptions of social position are investigated among older Turkish and Moroccan immigrants living in the Netherlands. Despite the fact that these groups differ culturally, Turkish and Moroccan immigrants have similarities with regards to their social position and migration history towards the Netherlands (Guiraudon, 2014).

Turkish and Moroccan immigrant participants were selected from a larger sample originating from the Longitudinal Aging Study Amsterdam (LASA) (Huisman et al., 2011; Klokgieters, van Tilburg, Deeg, & Huisman, 2017). This sample included a total of 478 immigrants. From the original sample eighty participants were approached to partake in the current qualitative study. Twenty were not included because they were not at home at the time of the visits nor reachable over the phone. Thirty-seven refused to participate in the interview for reasons of being physically incapable of doing an interview (2), speaking only Berber (2), having already received many requests for interviews (2), having no time for an interview (6), because of

the Ramadan (1) or does not wish to participate without giving a reason (24). In order to ensure gender diversity in the sample, an equal number of males and females were selected. Participants who were selected were sent a letter for notification and were visited a week later together by the first author and research-assistants with Moroccan Arabic (Darija) or a Turkish-speaking ability. In total, 23 participants were interviewed, ten of which were born in Turkey and thirteen in Morocco (Table 2.1).

Role of research–assistants

In order to interview Turkish and Moroccan immigrants in their own language we collaborated with two bilingual research-assistants. The assistants had more than just the role of translator. On the outset of the interviewing process, they were elaborately briefed on the study topic and aims. During the translation of the topic list, meanings of each word were discussed in all three languages (Dutch, Turkish and Darija) in order to reach agreement across interviews. During the interview, they asked clarifying probing questions if necessary and to give a summary of the participant's answer. Summaries were only preferred when the participant's answer was very long or when the participant was emotional. In other cases the participant's whole answer was translated. We worked collectively during the interview, often in Dutch and in native language of the participant. The principal researcher had a coaching role in initiating and determining the new topics, supervising the assistants, and asking probing questions.

Interviews

During each interview, we applied an increasingly rigid interviewing structure. Interviews were initiated by asking a broad open question "What do you feel is going well in your life currently?" Subsequently, a number of tools were used in order to elicit participant's life stories. For this study we focus on the results obtained through the 'community ladder' (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000), here referred to as the societal ladder. The participant was shown a picture of a ladder with ten rungs (Figure 2.1; Adler et al., 2000). The interviewers explained to the participant that those who were best off in society were at the top of the ladder, and those who were worst off were at the bottom. We made no reference to 'traditional' socioeconomic or to other factors. The participant was, subsequently, asked to position him/herself on this ladder reflecting their current situation, the situation before migrating to the Netherlands and their situation right after migrating to the Netherlands, and was asked why he or she chose the positions.

The interviews lasted on average one hour and fifteen minutes. Apart from two participants who refused, all interviews were tape-recorded. The recorded interviews were transcribed and translated verbatim. Translations from Turkish or Daija to Dutch were executed by research-assistants. As recommended in the literature (van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, & Deeg, 2010), for the

Table 2.1. Characteristics of participants

| | Objective indicators | | | Position ladder | | | Circumstances mentioned | | | | |
| | Employment (No/Yes) | Education (N/L/M/H) | Income | Currently | Right after migration | Before migration | Socioeconomic | Social | Societal | Health & well-being | Religion |
Participant pseudonym											
Mr. L	No	N	1135-1361	5	5	5	X				
Mr. T	No	L	2043-2269	5	3	1	X				
Mr. C	No	L	1135-1361	1	9	10	X				
Mr. A	No	L	795-901	1	4/5	10	X	X			
Mrs. R	No	L	1816-2042	10	5	5	X	X		X	X
Mr. V	No	L	1362-1588	5	4	1	X	X		X	X
Mrs. O	Yes	M	1589-1815	7	6	6	X	X		X	X
Mr. M	No	L	795-907	10	10	10	X	X			
Mrs. K	No	N	1362-1588	10	10	10	X	X			
Mr. N	No	L	3177-3403	9	1	1	X		X		
Mr. H	No	L	568-680	10	Varies†	10	X		X	X	X
Mr. U	No	L	1589-1815	5	5	4	X		X		
Mr. W	No	L	1135-1361	10	5	1	X				
Mrs. E	No	M	3631-3857	8	4	7	X		X		
Mrs. D	No	N	795-907	5	10	6		X		X	X
Mrs. F*	No	N	795-907	5	1	10		X	X	X	X
Mrs. Q	No	N	1135-1361	10	10	1		X	X	X	X
Mr. B	No	M	2043-2269	1	5	10		X		X	X
Mrs. G	No	H	Refusal	9	5	5		X		X	X
Mrs. S	No	L	1022-1134	7	6	*		X		X	X
Mr. I	No	N	1816-2042	Varies††	1	5			X	X	X
Mrs. J*	No	L	Does not know	10	10	10					
Mrs. P	Yes	L	1135-1361	7	4	2			X	X	X

N = no education, L = low, M = middle, H = high.

* Participant did not answer the question.

† Participant based his position on the country of residence after migration. In Spain: first high and then low, in France: low, in Belgium: high and then later low, and in the Netherlands: high.

†† Participant based his position on the weather and whether he feels healthy: when the weather is good and he is healthy he places himself high, when conditions are normal (according to him weather and health not extremely bad) he places himself in the middle.

Figure 2.1. The 'Societal Ladder'.

translations of quotations from Dutch to English the first author worked side by side with a native English editor skilled in Dutch. The other interviews were summarized based on notes taken during the interview. During most interviews' spouses or other family members (usually young grandchildren) were present for longer or shorter periods of time. Despite the sometimes disruptive interferences during the interview, the majority of interference was useful and added to the clarification of issues.

Analysis

We used thematic analysis which method is geared towards identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Firstly, transcripts were (re)read several times in order to derive initial codes. We focused on instances where the participants made referrals to their social position in the initial part of the interview and in the part where the 'societal ladder' was used. We payed specific attention to placement strategies, which mentioned specific circumstances or referent groups and whether placement strategies resulted in ascending, descending or standing still on the ladder. Next, the initial codes were analysed for the purpose of understanding the relationship between codes and to distil themes and levels of themes. We used methods of constant comparison by rereading and recoding the interviews to ensure consistency in coding and analysis. Finally themes of social position lead to an inside how immigrants make up the social position and which strategies foster ascending, descending of standing still on the ladder.

Results

Participant's social position: low or high?

In the first research question we asked where participants positioned themselves on the societal ladder. Table 2.1 columns 2-5 depict the rung where participants currently placed themselves. Among male participants, there was a large variation: participants positioned themselves across the full range of the ladder. Combinations of relatively favourable socioeconomic indicators and a low self-perceived position on the ladder, and vice versa, were present. No female participants placed themselves low on the ladder. All females currently placed themselves higher than the fifth rung of the ladder.

Socioeconomic circumstances or other considerations

The second research question asked whether participants, currently, mainly had in mind socioeconomic circumstances or whether they used other circumstances to place themselves additionally or exclusively. Socioeconomic circumstances, indeed, played a role in self-placement of many participants. Yet, very few participants used socioeconomic circumstances as the sole determinant of their position (see Table 2.1). More participants used social, health and well-being and, religion circumstances for self-placement. Some participants refused to use socioeconomic circumstances altogether.

Table 2.2 depicts which socioeconomic circumstances, were mentioned. Participants referred to multiple socioeconomic circumstances including, employment, education, being rich, having enough money to live from, and status. Mr. L, for example, focused primarily on employment:

> "I already said in the middle, now too. Sometimes in Morocco, sometimes in the Netherlands. If you don't work, you go down." (Mr. L, currently on rung 5)

Mrs. E mentioned that she would have achieved a higher rung in her life, if only she had studied more. Consequently, she placed herself not on the tenth but eight rung:

> "Sometimes I think "oh if I would've studied", a little bit language, then I would've had a better job than the one that I have now. I'd be a doctor or something else, a psychologist." (Mrs. E, currently on rung 8)

More, often, however, participants focused on being smart rather than education as a means of placement. Mr. T, for example, placed himself on the fifth rung because he feels he is less smart but not in a particularly bad position economically:

> "Yes, study […] Yes, perhaps this other person has studied a lot more then you have, […]. And yes, the other person didn't study. He's just a smart cookie. You know, he's

even better off than the person who studied and he has enough money to live on (….) In the middle is where I place myself […] Look, when you're there [rung 10], then you have to think a lot. I find it difficult thinking; I'm not that kind of person."
(Mr. T, currently on rung 5)

Mr. C, by contrast, focused on wealth and status. He explained that those who are rich are on the highest rungs of the ladder and those who are poor on the lowest rung. He placed himself on the lowest rung because he considered himself to be poor.

"Financially I cannot do that, and yes, all problems in life start from that point, financially. If I stay here [rung 1]. […] It's not so much, but I've learned to live on it."
(Mr. C, currently on rung 1)

While Mr. C assigned himself to the lowest rung of the ladder, he still emphasized that he learned to live with his situation and was able to sustain himself with little money. This was narrated by many participants, who admittedly were not so well off socioeconomically, but who emphasized being content with their situation. Women also mentioned the importance of wealth. Mrs. K, for example, mentioned she was happy that her husband gave her enough money and she had freedom in spending it. Therefore, she placed herself on the tenth rung of the ladder:

"My husband never asked me what I did with the money. Where I spent it or how much of it was left. I sometimes hear from people around me that this happens."
(Mrs. K, currently on rung 10)

Some participants combined socioeconomic circumstances with other social circumstances. Social circumstances included being married, having a happy family life (children and

Table 2.2. Explanation of circumstances

Theme	Codes
Socioeconomic	Employment, being smart (as a substitute for being educated), being rich, having enough money to live from, status, property ownership, coming out of poverty
Social	Being married, having a good marriage, having (grand) children, having (married) children, receiving affirmation by others, good interaction with others
Societal	Freedom, opinion of society, language, knowledge about culture, ability to participate in society, homesickness, feeling fearful and alone, learning a new culture
Health and well-being	Being healthy, feeling healthy, being happy, feeling young, being sad
Religion	Going to Mecca, praying regularly, feeling close to God, being a good person, position to God, knowledge about the religion, being a good Muslim

grandchildren, preferably married) and being appreciated by others through social affirmation (Table 2.2). In this regard participants seemed to have a vision in mind of what their situation ought to be. For example, they wanted to have a family including a wife, children and grandchildren. Participants positioned themselves on the ladder according to the extent in which they saw themselves complying to this vision. Mr. V and Mr. A provided examples for this line of reasoning.

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> Participant: *"The middle, in the middle."*
> Interviewer: *"And why there?"*
> Participant: *"Because I don't have a wife. If I had a wife, then I would be higher."* (Mr. V, currently on rung 4)

> *"Myself? I am all the way down here [rung 1]. This is my life. Look no wife, wife died, no money, nothing. I just sit here; is that life? Really, I am here. And that is difficult. […] A marriage is better, your wife makes tea in the morning, prepares breakfast."* (Mr. A, currently on rung 1)

Mr. V considered his socioeconomic circumstances to be not too bad. As a consequence, he placed himself close to the middle of the ladder. What refrained him from placing himself higher is the fact that he did not have a wife. Mr. A also regrets not having a wife. He mentioned a wife could bring him tea and breakfast every morning. This represented a broader vision in which marriage is an important precondition.

Another way in which social circumstances played a role in self-placement was through social affirmation. Participants emphasized being good to others and feeling appreciated by others through statements such as "ask my uncle" or "ask my neighbour". Mrs. H, for example, placed herself on the eighth rung of the ladder because of her status, education and wealth. In addition, she mentioned regularly how well her children, daughters-in-law, neighbours and her co-workers perceive her:

> *"All the way at the top. Why would I put myself at the bottom? I never treated anyone badly and I never put anyone down. […] Nobody, no matter who. This is why I never heard anyone speak ill about me. People say that my daughters-in-law are happy about me. […] But also my neighbours, my colleagues, they say that they were happy with me."* (Mrs. H, currently on rung 8)

Other participants based their social position on their mental and physical health and happiness. In general being unhappy, unhealthy and poor were associated with lower positions; being happy, healthy and rich were associated with higher positions. Some participants mentioned their health casually and in relation to their wealth. A participant said "*you have to be happy and rich*" (Mr. V, currently on rung 5) and another said "*I am here,*

I am not sad and I am not sick" (Mrs. O, currently on rung 7). Other participants mentioned that health was actually the most important determinant of placement, like Mr U.

> *"The best wealth is health. When I'm healthy, I'm rich. That's the only type of wealth I see."* (Mr. U, currently on rung 5)

Participants used *religion* for placement on the ladder. Particularly in terms of being a "good Muslim". Participants positioned themselves on the ladder based on whether or not they complied with pillars of Islam including pilgrimage to Mecca or praying five times a day. Combining the religion domain and the socioeconomic domain seemed offer contradictory lines of reasoning. On the one hand, participants emphasized how unimportant money and status were to them: it was morally unjust to do so according to their religion. On the other hand, they used their socioeconomic circumstances as a means to position themselves. In order to reconcile religion with their position, they emphasized regularly how grateful they were with their life and how little influence they themselves had on their achieved socioeconomic position. Mr. W, for example, used income and wealth as reasons to position himself on the ladder. Later in the interview he emphasized the role religion in his wealth:

> *"Thank God, we have everything. May god make us rich in our faith. Our faith in God is strong."* (Mr. W, currently on rung 10)

Some participants felt that their religion impeded them in using socioeconomic circumstances for placing themselves. These participants actively rejected the use of socioeconomic circumstances for placement. Instead, they offered alternative circumstances for self-placement such as religion and happiness. One example is Mrs. E who rejected socioeconomic circumstances:

> Interviewer: *"Where do you see yourself on the ladder at the moment?"*
> Participant: *"Well, what I see, I'm a believer, so the societal ladder doesn't mean anything to me. Absolutely nothing."*
> Interviewer: *"Why not?"*
> Participant: *"You live, you have a roof over your head, like everybody else. To associate yourself with a ladder, doesn't mean anything to me. I don't know, if I look, for example, at the Prophet, he was a very poor man, he slept on the floor and sometimes he didn't eat for three days. I mean, on the bottom of the ladder shouldn't have to be disadvantageous for you, and here on the top of the ladder also doesn't have to be very good for you."*

But when she is asked to place herself on the ladder:

> Participant: *"Well, I **feel** I'm at the top."*
> Interviewer: *"And what puts you there? What are the things …?"*

Participant: *"Well, when you're happy with yourself, then you're the happiest person on earth, really."* (Mrs. E, currently on rung 10)

Note that the interviewer never mentioned socioeconomic circumstances. Yet, Mrs. E along with others felt compelled to explain why she herself did not want to use socioeconomic circumstances. Instead she resorted to her own view of social position which was related to happiness and being a good person.

Changes over the life stages

The third question was about whether participant's perception of their social position changed when referring to different stages in their life (i.e. currently, right after migration and before migration). We found that the majority of participants experienced a change in their social position. In general we observed five patterns.

The first pattern included the participants who experienced a declining social position over different life stages. Participants justified changes using socioeconomic conditions, social conditions, age conditions, and societal circumstances. Mr. C, for example, moved from rung 10 during his younger years and 9 right after migration, towards the lowest rung on the ladder during older age. He gave the following explanation:

"Before I came to the Netherlands. I was here, at the top […] I had two cars, two houses, my children went to the nicest crèche, there was enough money […] this situation, where I am now, yes down, at rock bottom."

Mr. C apparently feels he became much poorer after migration than before. As such, he placed himself lower on the ladder in older age. Similarly, Mr. A descends from the societal ladder from rung 10 to rung 4 to rung 1. In contrast to Mr. C who focuses on socioeconomic circumstances, Mr. A focused on unrealized expectations in order to place himself:

"In Turkey, I wanted to have a good life, of course. To have a family, to be happy – and then I could put myself right at the top. Now though, I have no house, no family, nothing. So I can't be up there. I'm still all the way down there [points to the lowest rung of the ladder]."

His hopes for the future have disappeared. In Turkey he had expectations of his life, which were not realized in later life. Another example in this category is Mr. B who experienced disappointment. His disappointment was focused on the way he is treated by Dutch people, which he regards as a problem especially prevalent in later in life. He was bitter over a lack of acceptance and increased discrimination that he experienced in Dutch society. This is a reason for him to place himself lower on the ladder:

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"I feel … second-rate, even a third-rate person. I used to feel like a Dutchman, nothing else. Okay, I was Turkish, but I had internalised it – I was Dutch. […] I don't have a lot of life left, perhaps only ten years. My fear, my son has my last name, is that something will happen to him. Like what happened to the Jews… In this society we are inferior… This is real, very inferior." (Mr. B, down from rung 5 to rung 1)

The second category of participants moved up on the ladder. Participants who were ascending the ladder used circumstances of socioeconomic, social, societal, health and well-being in order to explain their upward movements. Mr. V experienced severe poverty during childhood:

"Well, back then, our financial situation was not so good. We couldn't survive on what we had. We were a big family. The situation is good now." (Mr. V, up from rung 1 to rung 5)

While he had problems with providing food for his family currently, he had more severe problems before migration. He therefore moved from the first to the fifth rung. Mr. V was not unique in this view of the ladder. Right after migration participants often mentioned that they saw themselves making upward movements because they now had a job and a stable income. This reflected a positive view on migration. Having work, regardless of the status of that work, was considered highly important to make slow ascending movements towards the top of the ladder.

"I slowly started working, make money. I worked about 13 or 14 years here. I sent money. So slowly I went up." (Mr. W, up from rung 1 to rung 5)

Participants who were climbing the ladder also used arguments related to religion as reasons to ascend the ladder. They placed the experience of growing old in the perspective of their religion and felt that they came closer to God as they aged. Knowledge attainment was important in this regard and granted them the reasons to move to a higher rung on the ladder.

Interpreter: *"You said you were "still fighting". What do you mean by that?"*
Participant: *"In terms of knowledge. Knowledge about religion. […] My lifestyle changed to a lifestyle that better fits my religion."* (Mrs. S, up from rung 6 to rung 7)

Societal conditions also were referred to as a condition to make upwards movements on the ladder. Mr. H for example, placed himself higher on the ladder due to his enhanced sense of freedom in the Netherlands as opposed to in Morocco:

"Tranquillity; just leave me alone. There is someone they call El Medioury. I was still in Belgium. He was a politician. France sent him to Senegal. He also appeared on

TV. He said: "You don't think Moroccans come here to work? Are they starving?" He said: "In our country [Morocco], there is no freedom"." (Mr. H, varies on the ladder)

For some female participants, the sense of freedom was similarly important for moving upwards. Mrs. G, for example, refused to see herself in a good position during childhood because she feels that she was denied life experience:

"Because I was still young, I didn't do much, […]. For us, in Morocco, for example, in my time, when you were, like, 19–20 years old, you weren't "living". You understand? Just to school, home. It is not like here, from 12 and 13 years old you can, for example, meet guys, go out in a group. With us, no. Just home, school, school, home." (Mrs G, up from rung 5 to rung 9)

She clearly refers to constraints imposed on her during her childhood in Morocco. These constraints hampered her to gain life experience and she gave herself a low social position as a consequence. Later in life, she mentioned that she moved up the ladder because she felt that she had gained freedom and life-experience.

In the third pattern, participants experienced a brief 'dip' in their social position right after migration. After the dip, these participants moved back up on the ladder, often because habituated to their lives in the Netherlands. During the dip participants mention fear, unfamiliarity with the Netherlands, bad weather and darkness as reasons to place themselves low. Participants also referred to a lack of access to services or social support, often resulting from a lack of language skills. An example is Mrs. E who mentioned that she felt handicapped because of her limited language skills. During later life she places herself higher as she is now able to speak Dutch and is independent (Mrs. E: from rung 7 via 4 to 8).

The fourth category of participants described that their social position had remained unchanged in their lifetime. Rather than giving up or down, participants who remained at the same position used different circumstances each time they were asked to position themselves. In this way they were able to argue that they stayed in the same social position. An example is Mr. M. who he clearly refers to socioeconomic circumstances in order to position himself before migration. These circumstances according to him were favourable, which results in a high position. Right after migration he said that he had a nice group of friends and he was happy, which forms his argument to, again, position himself in the tenth rung. In older age, while he admitted that circumstances were not so favourable, he still placed himself on the highest position because he accepted his fate.

In the fifth pattern, participants varied constantly in their position on the ladder. Often this depended on their current level of stress or happiness. An example is Mr. I. He refused to potion himself on one rung. Rather he explained that he felt his position constantly changes.

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When he felt healthy and the weather was nice he positioned himself on the lowest rung. When he thought about his life in general, he positioned himself in the middle. When he felt young, he positioned himself even higher:

> *"When it's cold, I often catch a cold. I also get a pain in my neck when I sleep. When I think about these things, then I put myself at the bottom. When I think about my life, then I'm in the middle. And if I feel young, then I'm higher."* (Mr. I, position varies).

Discussion

We set out to answer the question of how Turkish and Moroccan older immigrants living in the Netherlands position themselves in the social hierarchy. Participants often placed themselves at middle or high position. For self-placement, they used circumstances related to socioeconomic indicators but they also alternated between circumstances from other domains including social, societal, health and well-being, and religion. Moreover, in the participant's view, their social position changed over different life stages with some placing themselves low before migration and high afterwards, others remaining in the same position and others experiencing decline in their position over time.

The socioeconomic circumstances that played a role in the positioning largely overlapped with those suggested in the literature, including educational level, occupational status and household income (Singh-Manoux, Adler, & Marmot, 2003). Participants referred to 'being smart' as being important rather than the level of education. A possible explanation is that many immigrants did not have formal schooling (Schellingerhout, 2004) and they therefore valued other aspects of cognitive achievement over education. While occupation was important, they valued merely having a job over the status of the job. With regards to socioeconomic position, we encountered empirical examples in which females directly referred to their husband when referring to their access to income and the freedom in making expenses. This is consistent with results from quantitative research among Asian immigrants in the U.S. (Chen, Gee, Spencer, Danziger, & Takeuchi, 2009) and among women in the U.S., Australia and Norway (Baxter, 1994) showing women are more likely than men to derive their socioeconomic status from their spouse's status.

Many participants alternated between socioeconomic arguments for self-placement and other circumstances in their social standing including social circumstances, health and well-being, and religion. Often these circumstances were presented as related to come to a final judgement of the social position. Social circumstances predominantly revolved around social affirmation and the extent to which the current situation complied with an 'ideal' picture of what life ought to be according to the immigrants. The norms that formed

this picture were in line with norms observed in prior literature regarding gendered social roles and an active family life (Buitelaar, 2006; Uğurlu, Türkoğlu, & Kuzlak, 2018; Yerden, 2013). Marital status played a central role in the way in which participants evaluated their social position. The presence of a spouse was not only important to comply with a social norm (Cela & Fokkema, 2017); it was also directly linked to access to instrumental support (predominantly for males) and companionship. Thus, the presence or absence of a spouse was the reason for some participants to position themselves higher or lower, respectively.

Good overall health, i.e. physical capacities but also happiness and mental health, was often mentioned in the context of a high position and poor health in the context of a low position. Older adults tend to be confronted with physical deterioration in older age (Stuck et al., 1999), which is known to be particularly prevalent among older immigrants (Klokgieters et al., 2017). Health and well-being play a role in older adult's general evaluation of ageing (Bowling, 2008) and so too does it influence immigrant's evaluation of their social position.

Immigrants justified their social position also based on religion. That Islamic religion plays a large role in the experience ageing among immigrants is hardly new (Ahaddour, van den Branden, & Broeckaert, 2018). However, our data show that its role in the self-perceived social position can be contradictory. On the one hand, participants reconciled both their religious circumstances and their socioeconomic circumstances by using both perspectives. For example, socioeconomic circumstances were used in the context of religious salience in participant's evaluation of their social position. On the other hand, some participants refused to identify any socioeconomic circumstances for placement arguments altogether. Rather, they argued that money, wealth and power are unimportant in life and based their position on happiness and moral justice instead.

Most participants had varying perceptions of their social position when referring to a different life stage (i.e. currently, right after migration or before migration). This confirms the idea that perceived social position involves aspects of personal growth, future prospects or positive past experiences (Woo, Wang, & Takeuchi, 2017). It also makes sense from a migration perspective. This is because a desire to claim status and power (Goldring, 2004) or to enhance one's social position are driving forces of migration (Glick-Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992). Personal migration history, however, played a role in two more unexpected ways. First, with regards to status, participants did not seem to be especially concerned with status obtainment in contrast to what was observed in a prior study (Danzer, Dietz, Gatskova, & Schmillen, 2014). We often observed a dip in perceived position right after migration among our participants. They indicated that unfamiliarity with the Netherlands, such as language barriers, hampered them from participating fully in society. This aligns with acculturation theories about migration in which immigrants initially experience a "culture shock" (Berry,

Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987; Bhugra & Becker, 2005). Second, we saw that the societal context played a role in the perceived changes in social position. Particularly females narrated on an increased sense of freedom right after migration. Interestingly the gendered conditions in the home country (de Haas & van Rooij, 2010) are important in the self-perceived social position of immigrant women. While social role poses constraints for women in their country of origin, including a specified social role as wife and mother (Gardner, 2002), some female participants experience freedom from those constraints after migration to the Netherlands.

Two limitations of this study need to be mentioned. First, in some cases the ladder instrument was hard to grasp for participants. Some initially understood the ladder as referring to the timing of migration or had trouble with the ladder as representation of their social position. This raises questions about the applicability of the ladder instrument among low schooled and oftentimes illiterate immigrants (Glasner, van der Vaart, & Dijkstra, 2015). However, we argue that all participants had a sufficient understanding of the ladder to draw conclusions about their social position. All participants who initially had trouble with the ladder finally understood the instrument, albeit after several tries and explanations by the interviewer. In addition, alternative understandings also provided novel insights in the way in which our participants viewed their own social position. For example, the participants who actively rejected socioeconomic circumstances as a means of self-placement revealed they had knowledge about what the common denominators of social position are. Second, we chose to focus on the social position of two groups of immigrants. Immigrants from Turkey and Morocco differ culturally, but we argue that there is sufficient similarity in their position in both the country of origin and of settlement (Schellingerhout, 2004). Likewise, in our data we find no striking difference between both origin groups with regards to their self-perceived social position.

We propose that the study of immigrants' placement on the societal ladder offers important contributions to the literature. First, immigrants perceived social position is dynamic over the life course and included aspects of migration and sociocultural integration, which are specific to each immigrant's personal migration history. More generally, societal context, perceived future prospects and expectations play a role in the way in which immigrants perceive their social position over time. Second, immigrant's own view of their social position is comprehensive and comprises of circumstances that are situated in multiple life domains, i.e., socioeconomic as well as social, health and well-being and religious domains. Despite the comprehensiveness in the way immigrants experience their social position, we have identified dimensions of both marginalization and privilege that pay a role in where immigrants place themselves in the social hierarchy. Notably this placement was not always unfavourable. On the contrary, many immigrants perceive their social position as favourable despite seemingly unfavourable socioeconomic circumstances.